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The Spy

When he isn't telling funny stories, Bill Cosby likes to lecture college students. "Stay in school," he advises, "all the dropouts have the jobs already." Cosby, a 1962 Temple University



Cosby: Successful dropout

dropout, knows what he's talking about. He has four or five of the best jobs in his business. He plays the nation's top nightclubs; starting next week he'll get \$3,000 a week for a two-week engagement at Washington's Shoreham Hotel. His second comedy album has sold 25,000 copies in two months, and in January his Warner Bros. single, "When I Marry You," comes out. ("The music is the same as the lyrics," he says. "It's a mumbling record.") Twice this month, he appeared on "The Tonight Show," and next season he will be the first Negro actor to star in a television series.

CIA Spoof: The series, on NBC, is called "I Spy," a cloak-and-dagger spoof, and Cosby is actually the co-star, with Robert Culp, but no second banana.

Culp and Cosby play CIA men masquerading as tennis bums, and the plot takes them to Tahiti, Greece, and Japan. They have already been to Hong Kong.

Race will be of no importance, just as in Cosby's comedy act. He is a stand-up satirist who happens to be colored. In "I Spy" he wants to be treated like any other spy. In one scene, filmed in Hong Kong, "This little Chinese kid rubs my face, and it doesn't rub off," Cosby says, "and he rubs my face, and it doesn't rub off. I don't want to be typecast having my face rubbed. If anyone else rubs my face, I'm going to rub back."

The problems in Hong Kong were mostly climatic (a three-day typhoon) and linguistic. The script calls for Cosby to speak Chinese, one of seven languages his character is fluent in. "I don't know Chinese," says Cosby. "I have a Chinese girl next to me and she says, 'Di gno woh vow bin chog,' and then I say it. Cut! Perfect!"

But his biggest problem was acclimating himself to a rickshaw. "I don't dig it," he says, "another human being pulling me around the city. If you want him to go faster, should you give him the whip, or what?"

Home Show: Cosby made it out of Hong Kong alive, and has several months to read up on Tahiti, his next stop. Now he awaits the birth of his first baby ("I'm not going to name the boy. Let him go out in the neighborhood and whatever they call him ...") and sifts his offers. "One doctor wrote that he wanted me to entertain in his living room. I think I'll send him a letter asking him to operate in my living room."

Mostly he is occupied with his comedy act. He has turned over three complete sets of material since he started in Greenwich Village coffeehouses two years ago. A warm, Ivy Leagueish sort, Cosby is out there, now as then, to make friends. He says people still stare at him as he walks through the lobbies of hotels he is playing. "They're saying to themselves, 'That guy does something in this hotel, or he wouldn't be here.'"